

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

DIA

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMSIXTHFLT

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, IS, LE

SUBJECT: TELEVISION REPORTS BLOCKADE OF LEBANESE COAST

1. ISRAELI TELEVISION AUGUST 17 REPORTED THAT ISRAEL IS BLOCKADING THE LEBANESE COAST. THE STORY, FEATURED IN THE EVENING NEWSCAST, DESCRIBED THE ISRAELI SEA PATROLS AS HAVING STOPPED A "FEW BOATS" AND CONFISCATED ARMS FOUND DURING THEIR SEARCH. IT ADDED THAT THE ARMS WERE SENT FROM EGYPT AND LIBYA VIA CYPRUS OR DIRECT TO LEBANON.

2. MARGALIT WRITING IN TODAY'S HAARETZ CLAIMS THAT U.S. OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON REFRAINED FROM CONFIRMING REPORTS OF AN ISRAELI BLOCKADE OR OF A SOVIET DEMARCHE TO WASHINGTON THAT THE U.S. MAKE ISRAEL LIFT ITS BLOCKADE. TODAY'S DAVAR REPORTS THE PLO APPEALED TO USSR TO SEND A SUPPLY SHIP TO TYRE OR SIDON TO BREAK THE ISRAELI BLOCKADE.

3. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL REPORTS OF SEARCHES AND SEIZURES OF CONFIDENTIAL

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ARMS-LADEN VESSELS BOUND FOR LEBANON PORTS HAVE APPEARED IN

THE PAST WEEK, THE TV STORY GIVES THIS NEWS QUASI-OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION. NONETHELESS, THE DIRECTOR OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE TODAY FLATLY DENIED THE EXISTENCE OF A BLOCKADE IN REPLY TO A QUERY BY OUR NAVATT. HE MAINTAINED THAT SEARCH AND SEIZURE BY THE ISRAELI NAVY WAS MAINLY OF VESSELS PENETRATING ISRAEL'S TERRITORIAL WATERS WITHOUT APPROVAL. (ISRAEL CLAIMS SIX MILES AS ITS TERRITORIAL WATERS.) HE SAID THAT ON INFREQUENT OCCASIONS WHEN THERE IS CONFIRMED INTELLIGENCE THAT A SHIP IS CARRYING ARMS IN DIRECT SUPPORT OF TERRORIST OPERATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL THEY HAVE STOPPED AND DETAINED SUCH VESSELS ON THE HIGH SEAS.

4. COMMENT: THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT ISRAEL IS LATELY EXERCISING MORE THAN JUST A WATCHFUL EYE ON SHIPS MOVING INTO LEBANESE PORTS. WHILE TECHNICALLY THIS IS SHORT OF A BLOCKADE, THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG OUR CONTACTS THAT ISRAEL IS STOPPING VESSELS ON THE HIGH SEAS. IN FACT, AT LUNCH TODAY PERES TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT CURRENT PRESS SPECULATION ABOUT ALLEGED ISRAELI BOLCKADE OF SOUTH LEBANESE COAST IS GROSS EXAGGERATION. AS IS WELL KNOWN, ISRAELI NAVAL PATROLS, REGULAR AND THOROUGH SINCE SAVOY HOTEL TERRORIST ATTACK, HAVE BEEN INTENSIFIED AS LEBANON CRISIS HAS DEEPENED. IN RECENT MONTHS IDF HAS INTERCEPTED SEVEN VESSELS WHICH MAY HAVE PENETRATED ISRAELI TERRITORIAL WATERS OR, WHICH, ACCORDIANG TO ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE, MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES HOSTILE TO ISRAELI INTERESTS, E.G., TRANSPORTING KNOWN TERRORISTS. PERES PLANS TO MEET WITH PRESS LATER AUGUST 17 TO PUT SITUATION IN SUITABLE PERSPECTIVE AND TONE DOWN WHAT HE REGARDS AS SENSATIONALIST REPORTS.

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